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SUBJECT: AN ISLAMIC LEADER'S VIEW OF THE U.S., THE ALGIERS
ACCORDS AND THE GSPC

REF: BAMAKO 864

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, U.S. Embassy
Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: On August 8 Mohamed Kimbiri, the Secretary General of the Association for Islam in Mali (AISLAM) and a 2004 International Visitors participant, discussed his organization of a July 28 anti-U.S, anti-Israeli demonstration to condemn the violence in Lebanon. Kimbiri also explained the logistics of organizing Mali's Islamic community, his support of the controversial Algiers accords between the GOM and Tuareg rebels, and AISLAM's view of the GSPC. Kimbiri said that AISLAM would not support the GOM were it to attack other Muslims such as the Tuareg rebels or the GSPC. The July 28 demonstration was a rare display of anti-American sentiment in Mali, and should not be interpreted as a change from the generally positive view Malians hold of the United States. End Summary.

The Anatomy of an Anti-American Protest

2.(C) On July 28 Mohamed Kimbiri, the Secretary General of the Association for Islam in Mali (AISLAM), organized Mali's first and only public protest against Israel and the U.S. response to the violence in Lebanon (reftel). The protest attracted between 300 and 400 people despite a driving rainstorm. Kimbiri is a key Embassy contact and an outspoken leader of the Malian Islamic community. He traveled to the U.S. in 2004 on an International Visitors program for religious leaders and visited Muslim communities throughout the U.S.

3.(C) Kimbiri said he originally intended to organize a march on either the U.S. Embassy or USAID building in Bamako. Kimbiri worried, however, that controlling the crowd in the market area around the U.S. Embassy could prove difficult. USAID's proximity to the Malian Prime Minister's office also posed logistical problems. Aware that trouble during the march could provoke Malian authorities to prevent subsequent protests, the march location was moved to the residence of the Palestinian Ambassador.

4.(C) To broaden the appeal of the protest, Kimbiri enlisted as a co-organizer PARENA, a coalition of small political parties led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tiebele Drame. During his negotiations with PARENA, Kimbiri insisted that the demonstration be billed as a march by members of the Malian "religious" community, rather than the "Islamic" community, in hopes of attracting support from some of Mali's non-Muslim religious associations. Joining his group with PARENA (which had been in the process of planning a similar protest) shifted the focus of the protest toward "solidarity" with the Lebanese and Palestinian people. Kimbiri, however, indicated that AISLAM's interest remained expressing anti-Israeli and, in particular, anti-USG sentiment.

5.(C) Kimbiri complained that Malian security forces in riot gear attempted to prevent protesters from assembling. At one point, Kimbiri reportedly told a Malian security official that they could "go ahead and shoot" because the protesters were going to march anyway. The security forces apparently

stood down when faced with Kimbiri's determination and the arrival of former Minister of Justice Hamidou Diabite as a march participant. PARENA leader Drame did not attend.

Kimbiri's View of the U.S.

6.(C) During the discussion, Kimbiri sought to reconcile his fondness for the U.S. with his newfound role as an anti-USG political organizer. He said the July 28 protest was against American policy and not the American people. When asked whether he thought his followers who were waving anti-U.S. and pro-Hezbollah placards during the protest made the same distinction, Kimbiri said he hoped that was the case. Kimbiri described his 2004 trip to the U.S., and the number of American Muslim leaders he met, as eye-opening. He recalled in particular meeting a Malian Imam in Chicago who was, unbeknownst to Kimbiri, a member of AISLAM. Kimbiri expressed eagerness to return to the U.S and said he has encouraged many of his colleagues in Mali's Islamic community to also travel. "I correct a lot of people in Mali," Kimbiri said, "when they try to talk about Muslims in America." On August 18 Kimbiri contacted the Embassy's political officer to state that a planned second march by the Malian Islamic community had been called off following the cease-fire in Lebanon.

Radio as an Organizing Tool

7.(C) Kimbiri used AISLAM's radio station, Radio Dambe, to advertise the march. Radio Dambe may not be among the three most popular radio stations in Bamako (as Kimbiri claimed) but it does have a wide audience, particularly in the market areas of downtown Bamako. In addition to broadcasting sermons and religious texts, the station airs news from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya in Arabic, followed by summaries in Bambara. Kimbiri said Radio Dambe unofficially broadcast BBC Arabic language news until recently and tried to reach agreements with both the Voice of America and radio Deutsche-Welle. Kimbiri claimed VOA and Deutsche-Welle declined to provide news programming due to Radio Dambe's status as a "religious" radio station. After traveling to Germany to convince Deutsche-Welle that Radio Dambe had programs devoted to news, sports, youth and women's issues, Kimbiri finally gave up. Radio Dambe's listeners, Kimbiri told Deutsche-Welle, would simply "remain misinformed." Kimbiri stated that this experience soured his opinion of western radio programming. (Note: The VOA's authorized outlet in Bamako is Radio Kledu. The Embassy will, however, look into the possibility of providing Radio Dambe with some VOA programming. End note).

Tuareg Rebels and the GSPC

8.(C) Kimbiri was one of the first public figures in Mali to publicly support, on behalf of AISLAM, the controversial July 4 Algiers accords signed by the GOM and Tuareg rebels. Kimbiri said he was eager to endorse the agreement "from an Islamic point of view" because the accords provided a way to avoid hostilities between Muslims. Kimbiri said he supported the agreement because "Islam is too often portrayed as violent." "Even if the accords are flawed," Kimbiri continued, "they can always be amended or corrected." Referring to rumors regarding a connection between the rebels and the GSPC - a connection both the rebels and the GOM deny - Kimbiri said that he and AISLAM would not support the GOM were it to attack either the Tuareg rebels or the GSPC in Mali.

9.(C) Asked whether one could interpret his support for the Algiers accords as an endorsement of President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) for reelection in April 2007, Kimbiri said Mali's

Islamic leaders have always been close to National Assembly president and ATT challenger Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK). Kimbiri pointed out, however, that being close to IBK did not necessarily translate into support for IBK's party, the Rally for Mali (RPM). Kimbiri acknowledged that IBK's denunciation of the Algiers agreement as an "accord of shame" ran contrary to AISLAM's position but stated that he and other Islamic leaders intended to meet with IBK to discuss the matter further.

Comment

¶10. (C) Kimbiri's political stance is best described as opposition to violence perpetrated against Muslims. His position regarding the United States, the Algiers accords, and the GSPC should be seen in that light, and Kimbiri would characterize himself as a friend of the people of the United States.

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